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The Supervisor and the High School

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THE SUPERVISOR AND THE HIGH SCHOOL

The title "The Supervisor and the High School" comes nearest to expressing the relationship which I have in mind in the treatment of a few topics which have impressed themselves upon me in my work of inspection and in regard to which I find weakness in different schools.

If I say "The relation of the superintendent to the high school" I am likely to meet a difficulty which to my mind is an exceedingly important one, and one which has seriously interfered with the success of more than one high school; I refer to those cases in which the supervision is divided between a principal and a superintendent, or in which the superintendent has turned over the management of the high school to a so-called principal — a most unfortunate condition for many medium sized schools; for this principal is likely to be an inexperienced, or an untried or weak person as is shown by a willingness to accept a lower salary than such a position should demand. The fact is, it requires as much ability to successfully manage a fair sized high school as it does to supervise a set of grades; but school boards in a small system of schools are not at all willing to pay equal salaries. In my judgment, under the prevailing conditions the superintendent of a system, including perhaps as many as thirty-five teachers, makes a mistake, as a rule, in giving up the direct responsibility for the high school, and I can name places which have suffered or are suffering from this cause. The superintendent might much better ask for a good first assistant and office help to deal with a large part of the necessary red tape, and retain that personal touch and understanding with teachers and pupils which there should be between a strong head and all parts of the school. I will go still further and say that I believe it is a mistake for the superintendent of such a system to give up teaching entirely; that the

personal aquaintance with pupils, the influence over them, and the knowledge of the condition of the school which comes from the intimate relationship with one or two large classes much more than meet the loss occasioned by lack of time to do a little extra supervision in other directions.

There are two quite sharply defined relationships between the supervisor and the teachers and pupils. These may be distinguished as personal and pedagogical, and strength in one does not necessarily imply strength in the other, though it is safe to say that good pedagogical results are very largely dependent upon the existence of the right personal relations between the head of the school and those under him.

The Personal Relationship.

The responsibility for unfavorable personal conditions and surroundings existing in his particular school should be a serious question with every supervisor, and I am confident that in many cases its careful consideration might lead to wonderful improvement. The vital question is "Have I done all possible to make the physical conditions and social relations of my teachers and pupils such that I can reasonably expect good school results?"

Just now there are hundreds of young people beginning teaching. They are intensely in earnest and they feel that the immediate future is big with its possibilities of success or failure. Many of them are very young, hardly more than boys or girls, and they are generally strangers in the community in which they are located; and we all know how common is the attitude of social neglect toward teachers. They are likely, too, to have experienced the common difficulty in securing suitable boarding places and find themselves in uncomfortable, inconvenient and unsuitable surroundings, very different from the pleasant homes which they have just left and which now seem so inviting, but so very inaccessible. Quite likely they have not even a recitation room which they can call their own, but being the youngest and newest teachers are shifted from room to room with the different classes. They are fortunate if the odds and ends of classes have not been assigned them after the old teachers have had their choice. Added to all this is their ignorance in regard to the what and the how of the school which is

almost inevitable. Is it right to expect good work under such conditions? Is it possible for the teacher to do it?

This is no fancied condition. I find it over and over in every respect. I have now in mind a teacher new in her position, most intensely anxious in regard to her work, who had been assigned seven recitations in five distinct subjects and who was meeting at the time of my visit about one hundred and fifty pupils daily. Naturally her work was unsatisfactory and the board discharged her at the end of the first term. Homesick, overloaded teachers are to be pitied; and, worse than all, irreparable damage may be done the school through them.

Now to what extent is the supervisor responsible? Is it too much to say that if he has been in his position for some years he is mainly so– Is it too much to ask that he exert himself in providing for his teachers proper physical surroundings, good boarding places and sanitary recitation rooms, knowing as he does that successful school work is almost impossible without them? I have heard teachers discuss prominent superintendents on this very point, criticising the one and expressing appreciation of the other. Such attentions pay both in the increase in the efficiency of the teacher and the influence of the supervisor, and in many cases they may mean the difference between the success and the failure of the school with all the resulting consequences to the supervisor personally as well as to the school and the teachers.

Fully as important is the personal relationship of the supervisor to the school as a whole. I am inclined to think that his influence more than all other influences combined determines the general attitude and spirit of the school. I do not underrate the effect of the previous condition of the school or of the traditions which have become almost laws, or of local environment; but when I see what has been done in cases which I could name in changing the whole atmosphere in a single year by the substitution of one principal for another I am led to believe that these are used altogether too much as excuses for personal shortcomings and poor workmanship. Nevertheless, the results of bad management, shiftlessness and low standards of character of a man at the head of a school do not always disappear the first year after he leaves, but may continue to exist for a long time unless the successor is an unusually strong man, and other conditions are favorable. I remember a case in

which the president of the school board in one of our prominent towns asked me for judgment of his high school As one characterization I described the high school as being "sporty". He fully agreed and at once began to lay the blame upon a man who was superintendent a few years ago, making very specific statements to establish the truth of his accusation. From my knowledge of the circumstances I think he was right and that the responsibility for the condition of the school lay largely at the door of that ex-superintendent.

Again, popularity with a school is not a safe measure of the success of a supervisor in the establishment of the right school spirit. The school president referred to above also spoke of the work of a man in former years who was at the time exceedingly unpopular with a large part of the community, but whose school now, after years have gone by and long after his work in the world is done, stands as a standard of excellence in the minds of the thoughtful of his ex-students, and is contrasted sharply with what has been done since. A supervisor may be "Hail fellow well met" with his pupils and perhaps with the community in general and at the same time his schools may be in a demoralized condition. On the other hand, it is true that without a preponderance of sentiment in his favor he usually might as well give up.

The supervisor should be the guiding force in all of the social matters relating to or connected with his school, not always directly but often better by making his teachers the prominent factors, seeing to it that they get into right relationships with the pupils. Many a teacher is neglected socially in the school and is lonesome and disappointed in her work simply because no part has been given her of social duty for which she will be held responsible. These are not minor matters and the wise men among the supervisors are coming to realize, as never before, what real social efficiency in the management of a school means, and the effect which a thorough organization of a school faculty under the guidance of a responsible head has on the scholarship and character of the pupils and, incidentally upon the attitude of the teachers toward their work. Such an organization of work gives opportunity for bringing about that unification of the teaching force which I find in some schools and which is absent in others; it makes a teacher feel that she is something more than a mere cog in a wheel driven

by some unseen relentless force, but that she is a living element in the school, expected to think for herself and to assume a part of the responsibility for the success of the whole even though it leads outside of the recitation room. Again this social work brings about that personal acquaintanceship which will overcome that fear of the superisor which teachers so often feel. As long as this exists there can not be that hearty sympathy which will enable suggestions to be given and received as they should be, and which is absolutely necessary before the teacher can look upon the supervisor as a real helper and friend who can be appealed to without loss of professional prestige. Something of the relation of the taskmaster and drudge is too often plainly in evidence.

The Pedagogical Relationship.

It would seem that every one connected with school work must realize that the continuous and increasingly insistent criticism of the schools is gradually becoming more definite and specific in the nature of its accusations and demands. Everywhere we see adjustment in the form of special courses and special schools some wise and perhaps more unwise, in response to these more or less clearly formulated criticisms.

It is not difficult to read these signs of the times. They indicate the growth of a business-like attitude toward the schools on the part of the public; there is to be less of a blind following of tradition, and less toleration of the merely formal and mechanical and more of an insistence upon the application in the administration of our schools of principles which underlie the conduct of successful enterprises in commercial life. The vague, almost meaningless terms such as culture, character and mental discipline which have been so freely used in estimating educational values are no longer being accepted, and they must be replaced by expressions which have a clear, tangible meaning to the average person, and by which educational results can be measured and the different studies of the course justified. The word character must be replaced by words denoting the elements of character, and the value of an exercise or study as a means of character formation will be measured by its efficiency in giving training in forming habits of honesty, accuracy, promptness, courtesy, independent think-

ing and other fundamental essentials of success in life. The so-called practical values of a study will be measured by the extent to which they are actually used in meeting the needs of life both in school and afterwards. Colleges will demand for preparation what they actually make use of in their college work and will rightfully demand that that shall be well done.

We may call such ideas commercial and utilitarian, and decline to accept them as standards of measurement in reaching high educational ideals; but they are the ideas which govern the world to-day and which have brought about the wonderful improvements, educational as well as well as others, of the last hundred years; and their influence over the schools is increasing every year.

If these demands continue in their present trend, and there is every reason to think they will, it is evident that their effect upon the supervisor will be revolutionary. He will be required to turn out from the factory called a school a certain product, young men and women, equipped with a body of definite usable knowledge and with proper habits so firmly fixed that they may be depended upon in times of stress and strain; and his success will be measured as in the case of any other factory by the product he turns out. There will always be a great loss in working with variable human nature, but it is safe to say that the present amount of waste of time, energy and valuable material will not be tolerated in the near future, and that the per cent of dividends must be largely increased or the factories will go out of business in their present form.

The great leaders are those who are able to anticipate the future and to be the first in preparation to meet new demands and conditions as they come. Our best supervisors today are those who realize that it is their duty, as never before, to be able to do with their teachers just what the superintendent of the commercial factory does with his workers in wood and iron — to state clearly what product he wants and to see that that product is turned out in an economical and efficient manner. Such a supervisor will realize what an amount of work and ability this implies. It means hard continuous study of the educational value of every subject of the course as long as his administration lasts, for these values are now many of them so vague and unsettled that even a place in the curriculum is denied to some subjects which have been heretofore considered almost in-

dispensable. He must be able to answer the legitimate questions asked by the thoughtful pupils and their parents, "What is the use of this study?" "What should it do for me if I do my work well?", and he must answer these questions in terms which can be clearly understood and which will appeal to the questioner as being worth while from *his* (the pupil's) standpoint. The day is fast passing when high school pupils will be required to do what to them is meaningless work simply because it is the custom. Neither will they be asked to do such work merely for some profound pedagogical purpose which only the instructor may have in mind.

In manual training I see a purpose back of every movement of the tool; in the mind of the teacher, perhaps a profound educational purpose not at all thought of by the pupil; in the mind of the pupil a more limited one, the table or cabinet which he is making, which is for him the objective point—the real purpose through which the results are brought about; the former becomes an incidental result of the latter. In algebra I see vagueness and uncertainty, a blind groping for some result imperfectly comprehended by both teacher and pupil. The natural outcome is the fire of criticism which algebra is now receiving simply because of the lack of appreciation of its educational value by the supervisor and poor workmanship by the teacher. I believe it is possible to have as clearly defined purposes which can be appreciated by the pupil in nearly or quite all of the academic studies as we have in manual training. The pupil's purpose, however, may not be at all the same as that in the mind of the teacher.

Whatever may be the needs of the future, one of the greatest needs of today is a better understanding by supervisors of the possibilities in the old line studies in the way of purposes and values leading to "bread and butter" results, coupled with the ability to see that these are reached in their schools. There should be less juggling with courses of study and more attention to, and I will add independence in, securing possibilities while we are waiting for the gradual development of advanced ideas now being discussed.

In addition to a knowledge of values the supervisor must have the energy and activity to see that they are secured. This means inspection and conference followed by inspection and conference continued. A school can not be supervised by

assuming that teachers understand their business so well that they do not need supervision and direction. Something more is necessary than a printed course of study even when this is fully discussed in the teachers' meeting. A supervisor's ability may be gauged fairly well by his ability to make a fair or a good teacher out of a distinctly poor one, due allowance being made for the incorrigibles who can not be helped by any human means. When teachers can report, as they have done to me, that during a whole semester or even a whole year they have not had a visit of fifteen consecutive minutes by the supervisor and perhaps have had none at all during that time, there is something wrong with the head of the school, and I fail to see how he is earning the small salary with which he is so dissatisfied On the other hand, when I am told of the practice of a certain supervisor in this state of visiting the same class for several successive days I feel that if this has been done, not in the spirit of hostile criticism, but in an attitude which calls out the best work by the teachers and pupils. I can safely assume that that man has some appreciation at least of the responsibilities and opportunities of his office. In addition he has a basis upon which he can intelligently direct and help the teacher.

The office of the true supervisor is not a sinecure. It seems to me that I know of no other person who requires so great a combination of rare qualities for genuine success. He must be a strong teacher to appreciate purposes and methods; he must be a man of the world having a knowledge of the needs, varying ages, natures and conditions of life, with ability to meet all classes of people upon their level of thought; he must have sympathy and tact to be able to secure the earnest, united efforts of teachers and pupils, and above all he must be a man worthy of the admiration and respect of teachers, pupils and community. It can not be expected that any one man will possess superlative ability in all of these particulars, but using this ideal as a standard the success of the supervisor as related to ideal success will be measured by the extent to which he possesses these qualities.

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